Social Media Guidelines for Sports Coaches, Volunteers and Athletes

Social Media continues to grow in popularity and can provide sports organisations and individuals with a wide range of benefits. It allows people to connect to the world instantly, it can enable clubs to disseminate information widely at low to no cost and it can provide a platform for governing bodies to celebrate success in their sport. We encourage sports organisations and athletes to use social media but to ensure that they do so responsibly. These guidelines are designed to provide helpful, practical advice to individuals within sport which can help keep you safe online.

Set Yourself Up Securely

Before posting anything online all individuals should ensure that their social media accounts are set up as securely as possible. Each website, app or device will require slightly different configuration to set it up correctly so for guidance on how to set up specific apps, website or devices as safely as possible please visit www.internetmatters.org. There are however some key principles which apply to all forms of social media:

- **Think carefully about who you connect with online – remember that once you connect, send a message or add someone as a friend or follower they can see everything you post. Would you really want this person to have full access to the details of your life.**
- **Never give out your password, pin or login details online or face to face. These things should be private to you and shared with nobody. You should also ensure that you log out after use and don't leave your social media accounts open on a shared device as other people could post in your name.**
- **Coaches and volunteers should not be 'friends' with junior athletes online. It is unlikely that you would share all the details of your life with the children in your coaching sessions so don't make the mistake of doing so online. Private chat functions are often unmoderated so can also leave adults open to accusation of improper use. If you need to communicate with your athletes outside of coaching sessions do so by group text message, phone calls to parents/carers or via a post on a closed club or governing body page rather than via your personal profile.**
- **Check your privacy settings regularly not just when you set up a new account. Most social media platforms default privacy settings to 'public' several times a year so you should check regularly to ensure that your accounts remain private.**
- **Don't add friends online that you do not know or haven't met face to face. You would be unlikely to walk up to a stranger in the street and tell them about your life so don't do it online.**
- **Turn off Bluetooth and location services on your devices when not in use as these can be used by others to view your private information or trace your movements. Similarly**

do not 'check in' on social media – by checking in regularly you are potentially telling the world your home is empty and ready to burgle, where your training venue is full of expensive training equipment or what your regular movements are so that people can target you when alone.

- **Remember that what you post online can be easily misinterpreted.** When things are typed instead of said face to face it is often difficult to know the true meaning of the words and people can easily take offence to a post that was shared without intending to upset. This is especially true when online abbreviations, hashtags or emoji's are used in place of words so before you post consider how someone else my read your post.
- **Never post or share messages, images or videos which are abusive, discriminatory or sexually explicit** – all three of these things are illegal and you could find yourself in trouble with police.
- **Think carefully about what other people' posts you like or share online.** Once you like or share a post you become associated with it even if you were not the original author so think first about whether this is something you would want to be connected with.

<u>Remember - there is no such thing as privacy online!</u>
We would encourage all individuals to consider three key questions before posting anything online:

1. Would you say this in front of your parents or grandparents?
2. Would you say this in front of the youngest children in your club?
3. Would you say this to a journalist at a press conference, sitting next to your coach/manager?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, think very carefully before posting. Just about everything you say online could eventually be read by anyone, including your grandmother, the children you coach or the editors of tomorrow morning's tabloids.

If you're used to using social media freely, it might seem silly that you now have to think a little more before you post, but this is one of the simplest ways of keeping yourself safe online. It's important to review your privacy settings regularly on any social network. But it's also important to remember that it's possible that everything you send or post could potentially become public. Once that has happened, it could be seen by *anyone and everyone, forever.* Even if you are using Snapchat, or a private messaging service like WhatsApp or Viber, the people you are communicating with can take a screenshot of your message. Once that's done, the image/words/video you've sent are completely out of your control. It only takes your friend to send it to a friend of theirs, and your private message is in the hands of a stranger, who can post it anywhere they like.

Once something starts to spread on the internet, it's impossible to control it, even once you've deleted the original. An ill-advised comment or photograph could still be popping up when someone searches for your name years from now – including potential sponsors, employers, etc. So check your privacy settings regularly, but also bear in mind that you can never be completely sure that what you post online will remain private. You have worked incredibly hard for many years to become who you are – an up and coming high performance athlete in a public sphere, a respected coach or valued volunteer. This means that people will form their opinions based on your sporting performances, but also on other aspects of you that they see portrayed publically.

Used well, social media has the potential to give you greater control of this than ever before, and to build a reputation for being dedicated, interesting, positive and inspiring. So before posting anything online first ask yourself how do I wish to be portrayed? What messages do I want to get across? Will my post reflect negatively upon my "role model" status? What parts of my life do I want to keep private? Is what I am posting going to reflect negatively on my public profile? Is what I am posting going to affect future opportunities for my personal brand? You can still be humorous and have a personality online – just think before you post.

Respect Your Sport
In the same way that your actions while training, competing or coaching reflect on your sport in general, so do your actions online. As a role model within your sport you can use social media to build on their pride in yourself and in your sport. Celebrate success and hard work but don't comment negatively on others' professional performance, be they athletes, officials or coaches. When you post online, make sure your facts are accurate and don't swear or engage in insulting or prejudicial behaviour. Don't be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. Before posting ask yourself how will the people who have helped me progress in my sport (such as my coach, my family, my club, my governing body) feel about me posting this? How will this post affect the way my sport is viewed in Scotland and further afield? If I am tempted to discuss a contentious issue within my sport, how important is it for me to have my say in public? Have I thought carefully about my opinion, rather than offering a knee-jerk reaction? Will this be a constructive contribution? Are there other ways I could pursue the matter (face to face, in a private email, or on the phone, for example)? Will what I am about to say undermine the hard work of those who came before me, or make life harder for those who come after? Could my post upset a current or potential sponsor for me or for the sport? Would I expect my own sporting heroes to post in this manner?

Respect Your Audience
Social media can offer a great way to connect with friends and family but the reality is that much of what you say to them on social media you also say to strangers, including fans and the media. Remember that people who don't know you personally are less likely to pick up on the context of your comment, or to know when you're joking/being flippant. Never post anything that's rude, abusive or discriminatory. Before posting anything online ask yourself who are my audience? Are they just friends and family? Are they fans? Are they media? Would I make this comment to this person face-to-face (for example, would I say this to someone I don't know, who has approached me in public?) Could this comment be misunderstood by someone who doesn't know me, or know my sense of humour? Would I be happy to see this comment in the newspapers tomorrow? Will my post create a negative news angle?

Planned Career Events
Some of the most important events in your career could be of great interest to others in your sport including younger athletes, fans and the media. These might include competition selection; change of coach, etc. It is better for you and for your club or governing body if you plan the release of important information together, rather than have it trickle out informally on social media. When there are important changes afoot, you should talk to your club or governing body about the best way to break the news.

If Things Go Wrong
If you post something which you later regret there are a few steps you can take to try minimise any resulting issues. You can start by deleting your post and tightening your privacy settings as

much as possible – bearing in mind that the damage may already be done if an image or text is already in the possession of others. You can then speak to your club or governing body to make them aware of the situation and ask for further advice.

If you are receiving upsetting messages or posts, the best response is often no response. Tempting as it is to reply, this can escalate the situation. Instead you can step away from your phone or computer and make your club or governing body aware of the messages and ask for their advice.

Block and report anyone who sends abusive text messages to you, and if you receive indecent images or sexually explicit messages contact your club/governing body Child Wellbeing and Protection Officer and/or Police on 101.